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Cattle Death Rates in Small Feedlots*

Cattle feeders reported a death rate of 2.0 head per 100 cattle marketed in 1992. The western region reported the highest rate of 2.7 per 100 head, while the Central region's death rate was lowest at 1.5 (Figure 1).

The National Animal Health Monitoring System (USDA:APHIS:VS) sponsored the study of farmer cattle feeders in July 1993. Study objectives were to determine the rate of death loss and the relative proportion of losses attributed to respiratory, digestive, and other problems on small cattle feeding operations.

The survey was conducted by Rockwood Research of St. Paul, Minnesota, from a sample of cattle feeders drawn from FARMAIL, a data base of Farm Journal, Inc. A total of 400 cattle producers responded to telephone interviewers. To qualify for the study, farmer cattle feeders had to have marketed between 100 and 1,000 head of cattle in 1992. The average number of cattle marketed per respondent feeder in 1992 was 300, with reports higher in the West (350) than other regions (Central = 300, East = 220).

As shown in Figure 2, the 1992 death rate was highest for feeders with the smallest number of marketed cattle, and leveled off at 1.8 for the two largest size groups.

Figure 3 shows that the death rate increased dramatically with increases in percentage of marketed cattle that were dairy breeds, from a 1.7 death rate per 100 head marketed for no dairy breed animals to a 5.2 death rate for feedlots marketing 100 percent dairy breed animals. Note that rates based on

Figure 1

Death Rates in 1992 Feeder Cattle by Region
Rates per 100 Head Marketed

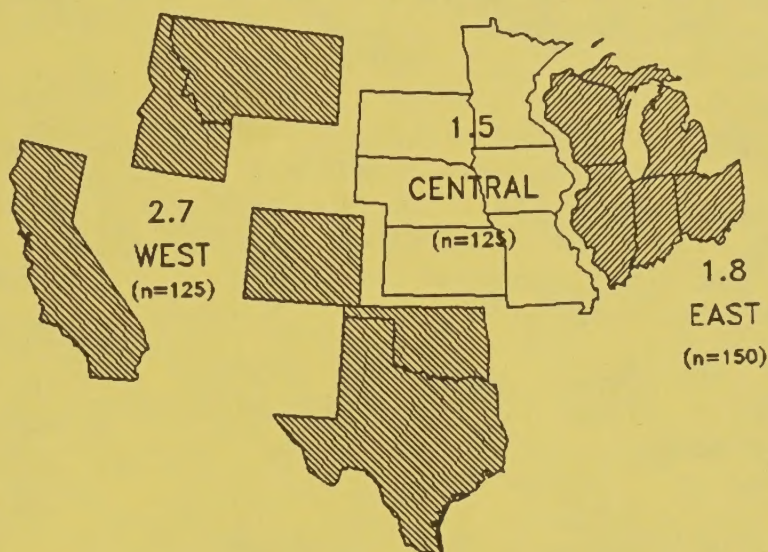
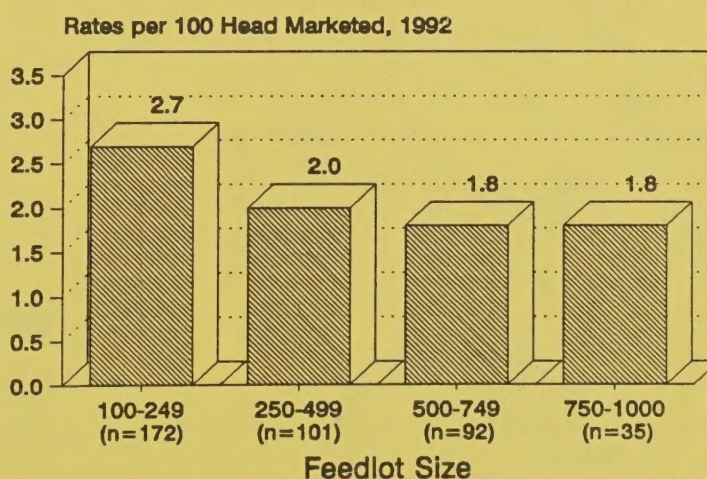


Figure 2

Death Rates in Feeder Cattle by
Number of Head Marketed in 1992



*Farmer cattle feeders marketing between 100 and 1,000 head of cattle in 1992.

percent of dairy breed were calculated from small sample sizes and, therefore, caution should be used when interpreting these data. Also, dairy breed animals are typically on feed longer and, therefore, have more days at risk of dying prior to marketing.

Also shown in Figure 3 is that the 1992 death rate was lowest (1.4) for farmer feeders who raised none of the cattle fed on their operation, and increased to its highest level (3.0) for feeders who raised all of their marketed cattle. This may appear to be contrary to conventional wisdom. Calves raised on the premises where they are to be fed are spared the stress of shipment and, in some cases, mixing with cattle from other sources which might decrease illness. One explanation for why the death rate rises with the percent raised on farm is that these cattle may be placed on feed at an earlier age (lighter weight) than purchased cattle would be. Raised calves then have a longer period at risk prior to slaughter and lighter-weight calves may have more difficulty resisting stress and disease than heavier calves.

Producers identified respiratory diseases as the major cause of about two out of three deaths in 1992, more so in the East than in other regions (Figure 4).

Cause of death reported by producers did not seem to be associated with number of head marketed (Figure 5). Feedlots with 100-249 head marketed reported the smallest percent of deaths due to respiratory disease and the highest percent of deaths due to digestive diseases. The percent of deaths due to digestive diseases decreases as the number of head marketed increases.

The cause of death reported by producers was not associated with percentage of cattle marketed that were dairy breeds (not shown). Deaths attributed to other problems was higher for farmers who raise a high percentage (≥ 50 percent) of the cattle they place on feed (not shown).

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Figure 3

Death Rates by Percent Marketed that Were Dairy Breeds and Percent Raised on the Farm

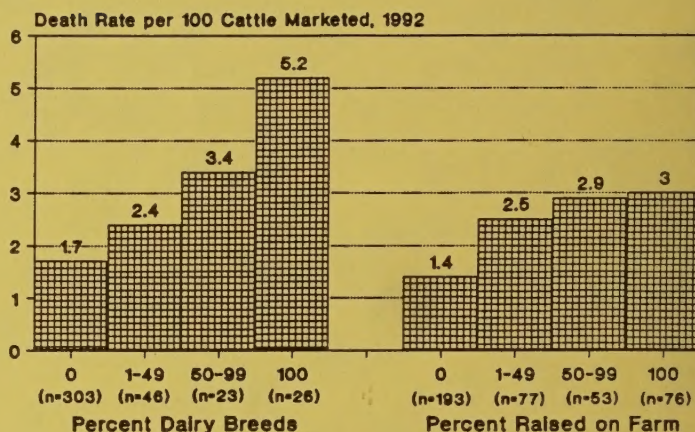


Figure 4

Average Percentage of Deaths Caused by Respiratory and Digestive Diseases and Other Problems by Region

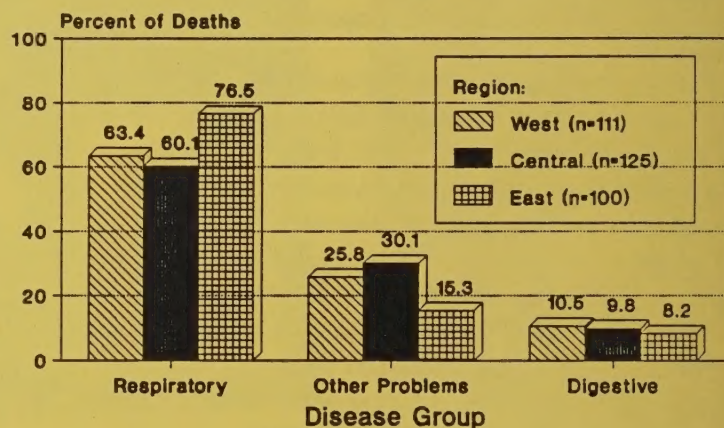
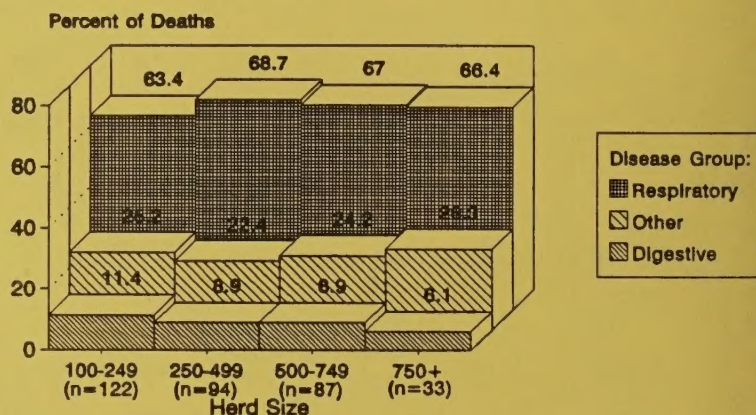


Figure 5

Average Percentage of Deaths Caused by Respiratory and Digestive Diseases & Other Problems by Number of Head Marketed



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